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Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded.

A Proposal for Doctoral Research Submitted to the Faculty of Arts,

entitled

"Narratives from *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* in the Select Novels of Anand Neelkantan: A Critical Study"

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Introduction

It's been about seven long decades since British colonization in India ended after both violent and non-violent freedom movements. The day 15th August 1947 marks the beginning of political decolonization in India but the cultural decolonization is a comparatively recent activity. As a mark of that process of cultural decolonization in India, the aboriginals started to look back to their roots and started to excavate the aboriginal myths, scriptures and the past glories with new zest and vision. This has been a normal course of decolonization all over the world and India, with its long and rich cultural heritage, was no exception to it. The mythical characters and the events have once again taken hold of the minds of the populace. The surge of the publications of books on the mythological subjects in the recent past is viewed by many as the exemplum of the same vigorous outlook borne by the even the highly qualified and long nurtured by the Western educational system with the values of progressiveness and the scientific approach inherent in it. Now a process of revisiting the ancient mythology has come to a new level of revision and the re-imagination of the ancient mythology. Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy is a major example of the same fact in the recent times. He reimagines and recomposes the mythological events in his novels.

Anand Neelkantan moves one step ahead of such attempts. He neither retells the mythological stories nor does he reimagines them. He moves away from such conventional narratives which are told and retold. He tries to present a counter tale to the conventional tale as well as a counter argument against the one which is accepted all over. His novels deal with the vanquished, the hated, the subaltern and the so called villains. He takes to the heart the principal that the history is written from the point of view of the victor and never from the view-point of the loser and the overturned. Anand Neelkantan takes the story from *Ramayana* and tells a plausible counter story that makes the readers rethink what they had assumed. In his novels he also takes the stories from *Mahabharata* and tells it from the viewpoint of the loser. Anand Neelkantan's *Asura: The of the Vanquished: The Story of Ravana and His*

People was his debut novel published in April 2012. In this novel he made Ravana, the arch enemy of Rama, the point of focus. He retells the story from his point of view. Ravana in the conventional narratives is an embodiment of evil therefore hateworth. Every year the effigy of Ravana is burnt by the people as a symbol of burning evils along with it. Neelkantan puts forward an arguemnt through his novel that such a hated and satanic character also has a good side and a counter as well as plausible tale to tell. The novel was followed by his *Ajaya Series'* first instalment entitled *Roll of the Dice: Duryodhana's Mahabharata (Ajaya Book 1)* in December 2013. In his *Ajaya Series* a new book was published with the title, *Rise of Kali: Duryodhana's Mahabharata (Ajaya Book 2)* in July 2015. In both these novels he deals with the story of Duryodhana, the villainous character form *Mahabharata*. The character's point of view, its motifs and actions are reinterpreted and reintroduced to the readers. The popularity of the novels tell that the counter tells are accepted by many. The writer's artistic capabilities are often tested in such an attempt. A serious critical study will bring into light the best in such attempts as well as the critical evaluation will bring into light the other aspects of the subject also.

Review of Literature

As the books are recently published, there are no critical books published on the novels or about the writer. However, there are many books available on the critical study of the Indian Mythology which in turn will be useful in the understanding and evaluation of the counter telling and the counter arguments put forward by the writer in his novels. Devdatt Pattnaik's *Indian Mythology: Tales, Symbols, and Rituals from the Heart of the Subcontinent* (2004) deals with the meaning behind the classical myths from the Indian mythology. He presents the compelling narratives of deity Kali, Lord Ganesha, Lord Shiva and many other Indian deities. The book deals with the current narratives of the mythological figures which are informative for the new generation but it does not deal with the counter narratives. His recent book *Myth=Mithya: Decoding Hindu Mythology*(2008) George William's *Handbook of*

Indian Mythology (2008) is hailed by many as a valuable book in understanding the ways and subways of understanding and exploring the complex Indian mythology.

About the ancient mythological women there are some books that give an idea of the conventional popular stories related to them which in turn can be used to compare and contrast the with the writer's art of characterization. One such exemplary book is M. L. Ahuja's *Women in Indian Mythology* (2011). The book deals with the major Women in mythology who have achieved the status of the deities like Durga, Kali, Saraswati and Sita etc. A more fundamental and crucial subject has been studied deeply by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty in her *The Origins of Evils Hindu Mythology* (1974). The book pursues the issue of the impact of the victor-vanquished relationship on the concept of evil in the Hindu mythology. As such, the novels of Anand Neelkantan have not been explored in detail by any writer to the best of my knowledge. This the study will provide for a timely demand for the serious and ;

Title of the Research:

"Reinterpretation of the Conventional Narratives from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in the Select Novels of Anand Neelkantan: A Critical Study"

Hypotheses:

1. Anand Neelkantan reinterprets the Indian mythology and Epics in order to counter-tell the stories of the vanquished and the silenced.
2. He counter-argues the contemporary narratives of the Epical characters and events to reach at the roots of them.
3. Rather than blindly accepting the mythical characters and the established narratives of the epics, the writer revisits them and plausibly challenges them.
4. He reinterprets the so called villains in the epics and brings into light the humane and the virtuous aspects of the characters.

5. His novels ask thought provoking questions to the common perceptions of the Indian Epics to enable the readers to see through the current narratives of them.

Objectives

1. To study the writer's reinterpretation and re-imagination of the Indian Epics in his novels
2. To critically study the major characters, themes, motifs and the symbols in the selected novels.
3. To understand and evaluate the plausibility of the argument and the philosophy of the writer reflected in his novels
4. To study and critically evaluate the writer's style and art of story-telling
5. To analyze the counter-arguments put forward by the writer in the light of the available resources.

Resource Material and Methodology

The study focuses on the critical analysis of the reinterpretations of Indian epics *Ramayan*a and *Mahabharata* in the novels of Anand Neelkantan on the basis of their artistic merits, the themes, characterization and motifs etc. Critical analysis will be the central agenda of the present research work. The study will be based on the resource material both from print and electronic sources.

The MLA Handbook of Research Methodology will be followed for citation and documentation of resources. The doctoral thesis will also follow the Ph. D. Ordinance of the University. The texts, journals, reference books and critical books will used for the research. As the study does not need any field work, the textual

analysis approach will be followed for the present research. The writer's interviews and the scholarly articles will be used with proper citation for the present study.

Proposed Chapter Scheme

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished: The Story of Ravana and His People*

Chapter III: *Roll of the Dice: Duryodhana's Mahabharata (Ajaya Book 1)*

Chapter IV: *Rise of Kali: Duryodhana's Mahabharata (Ajaya Book 2)*

Chapter V: Conclusion

Bibliography

Chapter I: Introduction

In the first introductory chapter, the writer's brief introduction will be followed by the introduction to the subject taken for research. The ancient Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are understood by many as the literary masterpieces while there are multitudes who worship them as the religious scriptures bearing the factual narrative of the gods and the deities. This complex subject matter will be introduced in this chapter which will be a basis for the comparison and contrast of the fictional characters and events with the mythical characters and events. The conventional narratives and the reinterpreted narratives will be juxtaposed in order to understand the art craft of the writer.

Chapter II: *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished: The Sory of Ravana and His People*

Anand Neelkantan's debut novel fully entitled *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished: The Story of Ravana and His People* was published in April 2012. It has Ravana, the

arch enemy of Rama in the epic *Ramayana* as the hero of the novel. The writer's reinterpretation and the recreation of the conventional narrative will be studied in the light of the scholarly resources. The writer's art of characterization and the creative use of the conventional narrative to build his counter-narrative will be studied. Moreover, the themes, motifs, and the symbols as well as the writer's philosophy will also be critically studied in this second chapter.

Chapter III: ***Roll of the Dice: Duryodhana's Mahabharata (AjayaBook 1)***

The writer then took the subject of epic *Mahabharata* for his next novel which he declared as the first of a series called Ajaya Series entitled *Roll of the Dice: Duryodhana's Mahabharata*. The book was published in December 2013. The writer treated the so called villainous character Duryodhan and made him the hero of the novel by the name Suyodhan (a good warrior). The writer's reinterpretation and the recreation of the conventional narrative in the novel will be studied in the light of the scholarly resources available. Again, the writer's art of characterization and the creative use of the conventional narrative of *Mahabharata* to build his counter-narrative regarding the Kaurava and Pandavas will be studied. Moreover, the themes, motifs, and the symbols as well as the writer's philosophy will also be critically studied in this third chapter.

Chapter IV: ***Rise of Kali: Duryodhana's Mahabharata (Ajaya Book 2)***

In the fourth chapter, the next installment in the Ajaya Series the new book *Rise of Kali: Duryodhana's Mahabharata* published in July 2015 will be critically studied. The writer has here focused more on Kunti's ambition to see her firstborn son Karna on the throne of Hasthinapur. The writer's reinterpretation and the recreation of the conventional narrative in the novel will be studied in this chapter. Here again, the writer's art of characterization and the creative use of the conventional narrative of *Mahabharata* to build his counter-narrative regarding the major characters and the crucial events will be studied. Moreover, the themes, motifs, and the symbols as well

as the writer's philosophy will also be critically studied in this fourth chapter while following the standard MLA Research Methodology and the Ph. D. Ordinance of the University.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The last chapter will conclude the present doctoral study. The observations and the evidentially proved findings will be documented in this chapter. The commendable conclusions drawn from the study will be recorded in this last chapter. The evaluative and critical analysis of the writer's craft of story-telling will be pointed out in this chapter. The concluding chapter will also underline the relevance and the significance of the study as well as the further areas of research will also pointed out.

Bibliography

A list of the select scholarly books which have bearing on the subject matter studied like encyclopedias, journals and reference books in both print and electronic media will be provided here. The select authentic and peer-reviewed websites will also be enlisted separately in the same section. The bibliography will be given in the standard MLA Methodology of Research Citation format.

Relevance and the Significance of the Study

In the most turbulent of the times when the nation is divided in the religions and innumerable castes, and beliefs of all kinds, the truth seems to have lost in the course of time. A narrative that is accepted as truth all over the nation has gained the status of religious scriptures. Yet, the counter arguments and the counter telling of the Epics have not ceased to exist. In the times when there are devout worshippers of Epical character Rama as Lord Rama and at the same time there are innumerable sympathizers to his arch enemy Ravana also, a fresh look at the epics put forward by Anand Neelkantan is a welcome move in the direction of re-understanding the Epic like Ramayana.

In his revisit and re-vision of the current narratives of *Mahabharata* Anand Neelkantan offers a fresh look at the most hated characters like Duryodhana and Karna. This counter narrative may unfold the characters commonly perceived as villainous and satanic and bring into light the other side of the story as well. Even if treated as merely fictional narrative, the writer's skill at creating sympathy about such characters is at stake in the novels. The study will evaluate the novels of the writer on their artistic merits. The present study deals with the most relevant issues like Sura and Asura as well as Rama and Ravana which are often the causes of the divide and the restlessness in the Indian society. The study will be significant in understanding the fundamentals of the issues handled by the writer. The novels of Anand Neelkantan are recently published and instant hits that also endorses the fact that there are many sympathizers to the counter arguments put forward by the writer.

The present study will also evaluate the new genre of Mythical revisionist novels currently popular on the basis of their artistic merits. The art of characterization, the art of plot construction and the major themes, motifs and symbols will be studied and critically analyzed in detail.

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